DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 206 031 CS 503 569

AUTHOR Nishiyama, Kazuo
TITLE Japanese Quality Control Circles.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 18p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (31st, Minneapolis, MN, May 21-25, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business: Business Skills: Cross Cultural Studies: *Cultural Differences: *Cultural Influences: Economic Development: Foreign Countries: *Industry: *Management Systems: *Organizational Communication: *Quality Control
IDENTIFIERS *Japan

ABSTRACT

In recent years, United States scholars with an interest in international business and organizational communication have begun to notice the success of Japanese "quality control circles." These are small groups, usually composed of seven to ten workers, who are organized at the production levels within most large Japanese factories. A typical quality control circle is a relatively autonomous unit led by a senior worker. Its major tasks are to improve methods of production, develop production skills among its members, improve worker morale and motivation, and stimulate teamwork within work groups. Ironically, the idea of the quality control circle was introduced to Japan by an American, William Deming, during the American occupation of Japan after World War II, and later developed by another American, J. M. Juran. In 1948, the practices of the quality control circle were diffused among Japanese businesses through the efforts of the Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers (JUSE). While the Japanese adaptation of an American idea has been phenomenally successful, a great deal of that success must be attributed to the Japanese cultural values, personnel management practices, and the homogeneity of the Japanese population. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED206031

JAPANESE QUALITY CONTROL CIRCLES

Kazuo Nishiyama, Ph.D.
University of Hawaii at Manoa

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Kazuo Nishiyama

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

31st ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION
Hyatt Regency Hotel
Minneapolis, Minnesota, U. S. A.
May 21-25, 1981

ALLS RIGHTS ARE RESERVED BY THE AUTHOR

CS503569

JAPANESE QUALITY CONTROL CIRCLES

The miracle of Japan's continued economic growth, despite the worldwide economic stagnation, has caused a sudden surge of interest among American scholars and businessmen in the "secrets of success" of Japanese business enterprises. Today, it is fashionable for American management experts to write about the potentials for learning from the Japanese, especially in the areas of personnel management, technology and quality control. In fact, moves are being made by certain Japanese industries to extend a helping hand to their American counterparts for rebuilding themselves by using the successful Japanese models.[1]

It is rather ironic to note, however, that this Japanese success formula is not of Japanese origin. Since the early postwar period, Japanese business enterprises have eagerly adopted American technology primarily through licensing, American management techniques and marketing skills through management seminars, observation and imitation. The original ideas of quality control were no exceptions. Two American quality-control experts, W. Edward Deming and J. M. Juran, first introduced the American methods of statistical control to Japanese engineers and statisticians. A series of lectures on statistical quality control practices by Deming, beginning in 1950, to top Japanese management was the turning point in Japan's all-out efforts to borrow and adapt the modern American ideas in rebuilding its industires after the devastation by the war. The contribution of Deming was so prominent in Japan that the Deming Prize was established to commemorate his pioneering work in the diffusion of quality control ideas. This has become one of the most coveted and prestigious industrial awards in Japan. It is given annually to the company and the individual who are the winners in the nationwide competition among thousands of quality control circles.

When, in 1954, J. M. Juran toured Japan, he introduced a new orientation to quality control which emphasized the participation of management in quality control activities. He insisted that quality control had to be an integral part of management and that it be practiced at all levels of the corporate hierarchy. His contribution complemented Deming's statistical bent and accelerated Japan's quality control revolution.[2]

From 1955 through 1960, these ideas spread rapidly among major

Japanese manufacturers--initially, by the efforts of the JUSE. The JUSE conducted a large number of training programs for the middle management groups on the effective use of quality control circles in order to upgrade the quality of Japanese products. In recent years, Japanese companies have become even more enthusiastic about the study of quality control because they fear that they may lose their industrial superiority due to the increasing international competition and the skyrocketing energy costs. Most recently, many Japanese companies have been adopting a new system called "Total Quality Control," or "TQC," which is designed not only to improve work quality in their production-related departments but also that of all other functional departments, including that of clerical workers. These companies send their managers and employees to the TQC seminars that are sponsored by the JUSE and other management training institutes. They also conduct in-house training sessions by TQC experts and by those company staff members who attended the seminars to spread the TQC ideas and practices within their respective organizations.

The Nature of the Japanese Quality Control Circle

A typical Japanese quality control circle at the production level is a relatively autonomous group of five to ten workers led by a foreman or a senior worker. However, contrary to what the word "circle" might suggest, it is not an informal group of workers of equal status who engage in brainstorming sessions on job-related problems. In fact, the Japanese quality control circle is exactly the same work group or its subgroups performing an additional voluntary duty to improve work quality. The foreman or the senior worker is assigned to lead his own quality control circle by directing and encouraging all of its members to participate. The quality control leaders must go through a leadership training program in which they learn how to conduct a meeting, how to get workers to express their opinions and how to induce participation among them. The leaders frequently hold meetings to exchange information, select performance themes, mutually assist in promoting each other's activities, and cooperate with each other in solving problems involving other work stations or sections. The management is also actively involved in the quality control circle activities by announcing specific company goals and providing awards and other incentives for excellent quality control circle achievements. There is a great deal of top-down control in many of the quality control circle activities because

the company carefully coordinates and regulates the activities through indirect means.

In other words, top Japanese management takes the initiative in setting up overall company goals and challenges all quality control circles to work out the most effective methods to help achieve these goals in their own respective work places. The top management often invites the top union leaders of its company union to present their suggestions and tries to obtain general consensus from the latter before setting up the company goals. For example, twice a year Nissan Motor Co., which manufactures Datsun cars, holds a Chuo Kieiekyogikai (Central Management Council) between the top management and the top union leaders to jointly review the past performance, to discuss the major problems of production, marketing and management, to analyze current market conditions and competition, and to decide on common goals. At this meeting, the top management voluntarily reveals the "management data" and presents new management proposals. The Union, in turn, submits its counter-proposals on work conditions and suggestions for improving production efficiency. And in an atmosphere of complete trust and cooperation, management and labor jointly work out specific goals that are mutually agreed upon. Then, these goals are communicated down to the lower levels of management and the rank-and-file of the labor union for implementation.[3]

The Ohbayashi-Gumi, Ltd., holds the "President's Quality Control Circle Evaluation Council" approximately twice a year. The President personally spends one whole day with the management of each division or branch office and jointly evaluates each division's or each branch office's stated goals such as projected sales volume and profits, the management of projects, the levels of success of each project, the specific problems of operations, and the solutions to those problems based on hard data and records. The two main objectives of this Council meeting are to evaluate the extent to which the top management's policies are being translated and implemented accurately in the actual operations of each department and to facilitate direct communication between top management and middle management. This is an innovative step to break away from the traditional executive council meeting in which "old friends" got together and discussed broad policy questions, and made subjective

and intuitive decisions without having looked at any data on past performance or future forecasts. This new approach is based on the "Deming Circle of Plan-Do-Check-Action," which is a more scientific and objective way to plan, manufacture, evaluate, and take corrective action.[4]

QC Circle Activities: The Case of the Nissan Motor Co., Ltd.

The QC circles in the Nissan-Motor Company were originally started in 1966 with 38 circles, but in 1979, the number had reached 4,162 circles with 35,327 employees or 99% of them participating. Between April 1979 and March 1980, Nissan's QC circle members made 473,448 suggestions of which 405,890 (or 85.7%) were adopted. As a result, they contributed to the company by saving ¥4.72 billion.

The types of suggestions were: (1) improvements on hand tools and machines, (2) improvements on operational procedures, (3) improvements of product quality, (4) savings on production materials, (5) systematization of office procedures, (6) reduction of costs and expenses, (7) industrial safety, (8) sales promotion and marketing, (9) development of workers' morale, knowledge and technical skills, and (10) other items pertaining to the company's growth and success.

Every QC circle meets at least once a week regardless of whether or not there is a problem to be solved, because it is a continuous group study process operating in the workshop. The members meet voluntarily during recess or after work hours, although the company pays only two hours of regular hourly wages per month for this activity. Each department or section has its own "suggestion promotion system" whose function is to motivate the members to submit their suggestions. All QC circles compete with each other in generating as many suggestions as possible in order to win honors and rewards given by the company. Therefore, the QC circles may meet more frequently during the period prior to the semi-annual company-wide QC circle contests. In addition, the best QC circles may compete in the All-Japan QC Circle Contest to win the coveted Deming Prize.

The QC circle at the Nissan Motor factory consists of five or ten workers who are led by a shokubacho, or a "union steward," with approximately twenty years of work experience. The circle membership includes two or three senior workers with ten to fifteen years of experience and several new workers. In other words, the QC circle is an extension of the

same work group or its subgroup which hierarchically structured by seniority. Consequently, the QC circle meetings are more like informal training sessions during which new members are first taught how to effectively participate in the circle's activities and how to apply basic statistical quality-control methods to their own work. The leader, or any of the senior workers, usually presents several problems that are directly related to the circle's workshop and every member actively participates in the discussion on each of the problems. The newer members can ask questions or seek advice from the senior members on the specific ways to solve certain production-related problems that they might have encountered that week. At the same time, they are allowed to freely contribute to the QC circle discussion by making suggestions and sharing their own experience with others. A few young members who have a good knowledge of computers and modern mathematics may even spend their own time outside the QC circle meetings to solve certain QC problems with the aid of the company's computer department.

They are also allowed to discuss interpersonal problems without any fear of being ostracized because the QC circle is a very cohesive family-like unit in which every member has an important role to play for the collective welfare of the group. If the leader senses any feeling of animosity or interpersonal tension, he will quickly hold a social gathering after work hours so that all members can talk to one another over a few drinks and a good meal. He makes every effort to resolve any such conflicts in order to maintain the atmosphere of mutual trust and solidarity within his QC circle.

The Nissan Motor Company provides many special events and educational programs that continue to stimulate the activities of all QC circles within the company. The slogan of the QC circle activities is the "3Ps," or "Participation, Productivity and Progress." Any new QC circle which has successfully solved twenty-seven problems is allowed to register itself with the QC Headquarters of the JUSE. Semi-annually, the company sponsors QC circle contests at different levels of the corporate hierarchy, starting at the lowest level of individual QC circles, at the section, department, factory and finally at the company-wide level. The winners of the factory-wide contests are given certificates of merit and a monetary award by the factory superintendent in the "January Festival,"

and those winners of the company-wide contests are recognized and honored by the President during the company's anniversary celebration (December 26) with certificates of merit and monetary awards. These winners usually enter the All-Japan QC Circle contests and compete for the Deming Prize.

In addition, the company spends a large sum of money on the continuing education of QC circle members by sending them to various seminars that are sponsored by management consulting groups and professional associations. Annually, one member is selected to go on an overseas QC circle study tour, ten members for the "Floating QC Circle University," forty-one middle-management members for the "QC Top Management Conventions," fifteen lower-management members to the "Section Chiefs' and QC Leaders' Convention," and sixty-one technicians to the "Symposium on Reliability and Safety." A much larger number of the QC circle members go through the in-house training programs that are designed to increase the effectiveness of the QC circle activities. The QC circle leaders from each factory take "refresher courses" in order to keep themselves informed of each other's activities and innovative QC techniques.

Every QC suggestion is first submitted to one's immediate superior who is able to accurately assess its worth at once, because he has first-hand knowledge of the basis or the reason for that particular suggestion. He often gives instructions or advice to the QC circle or its individual member on how to properly write up the suggestion. The deadline for submitting suggestions is the 20th of each month, and all the suggestions are then reviewed and proper awards are decided upon by the designated panel of judges by the 20th of the following month. Each suggestion is evaluated carefully for its merits and given a ranking and points. The maximum monetary award is ¥200,000 for the suggestion which received 150 points and the minimum award is ¥500 for the suggestion with five points. However, the real incentive is not the monetary award but the honor of receiving the highest ranking and a certificate of merit from the top management.

The New QC Circle Experiment at the Nissan Motor Co., Ltd.

Traditionally, the QC circle activities are limited to those of production-oriented departments and sections only. However, in 1977 the Nissan Motor Company started QC circles among the administrative

staffs and clerical workers in order to systematize the office management procedures since the management had recognized a serious lack of efficiency in the office operations. This efficiency improvement program is called "Office Automation" and its slogan is the "3Ms," or the elimination of Muda (Waste), Mura (Sporadic Action), and Muri (Overexertion). One of the first steps taken to assess the efficiency of each job category was to have every manager or worker keep a work activity log book with entries at thirty-minute intervals. This log was analyzed by the job flow, the volume and the time required. Then, each QC circle made specific suggestions to improve the efficiency of its own members' work. Several of the major goals stated by the Office Automation Committee are: (1) systematic filing of documents and reduction of unnecessary files; (2) reduction of EDP output; (3) reduction of office stationery and the copying of documents; (4) reduction of the number of conferences and a two-hour limit for all conferences; (5) efficient use of the telephone and the reduction of telephone charges; (6) reduction of unnecessary printing and distribution of reports or research materials; and (7) reduction of computer printouts.

In order to accomplish these goals, QC circles in each section or department are required to set their own goals and prepare the "Signal," a leaflet which explains specific methods to achieve such goals, office manuals and posters to inform each member of the QC circles' recommendations. To cite a few examples, the September 13, 1978 issue of the "Signal" on telephone usage talks about the "five major crimes of long telephone calls and gives nine specific suggestions on the best ways to eliminate unnecessarily long phone calls and to reduce the number of telephone calls as well. The target of this efficiency campaign is quoted as "a 30 percent reduction on the total telephone charges by 1980." Another issue of the "Signal," dated June 8, 1979, reports that the total time used for conferences at the home office has been reduced to 76,000 hours from 100,000 hours and that the company saved ¥430,000,000 in wages and other expenses during the 1978 calendar year. It also encourages other offices to limit their conference time to an average of two hours and to use the eight basic rules of efficienct conference management. It is reported that the Office Automation Programs have been extremely successful at the Nissan Motor Company.[5]

Total Quality Control Activities in the Japanese Construction Industry

Unlike other Japanese manufacturing industries, Japan's construction industry was not able to adopt the traditional QC circle activities due to its complex business structure. However, with the introduction of Total Quality Control (TQC) several years ago, many major Japanese construction companies have vigorously begun their effort to adopt this new idea of quality control on every phase of their business activities and at every level of their corporate structure. The Takenaka Komuten, Ltd., started their TQC program in 1976 and won the Deming Prize, the first in the construction industry. The Shimizu Construction Company initially adopted the QC Circles in 1976 and the TQC in 1979, the Kashima Corporation started the TQC activities in 1977, and the Ohbayashi-Gumi, Ltd., established the "TQC Office" in 1980. Today, there is a "TQC boom" in the Japanese construction industry.

The adoption of TQC activities in the construction industry is a much more difficult task because its management and workers are totally unfamiliar with the TQC and also are required to control several unique factors such as subcontractors, material suppliers, construction sites, weather conditions, and political and economic trends. Any construction company which acts as a general contractor must skillfully coordinate the work of many subcontractors performing different tasks. It must work with architects, engineers, heavy equipment operators, carpenters, masons, plumbers, painters, glaizers, roofers, interior decorators, and others who work for different companies. The construction materials such as lumber, concrete, iron, glass, tile, paint, plumbing fixtures and many other items must be carefully checked to avoid any defective items that might be inadvertently used. Because the construction site of a project is changed to another site once the project is finished, it is difficult to apply the same construction techniques that worked at the first site to the next site. The weather conditions must always be considered and contingency plans must be made to cope with unexpected delays due to bad weather. The construction industry must always be sensitive to both political and economic changes during the entire period of construction and marketing of a project. Any negative political action or economic recession can ruin a good project. A unique problem of the construction industry, then, is that it must set up different "living standards"

applicable to each of its construction projects.[6]

In order to overcome these difficulties, many Japanese construction companies have taken bold steps forward in education and in the implementation of TQC ideas. For example, the Kashima Corporation executive who is in charge of its TQC program preached the "spiritual revitalization" and the "strong sense of solidarity" of every member of his company. He insisted that the president-himself must lead this innovative program with enthusiasm and that the top management members must also be good leaders of the TQC activities. Subsequently, he instituted the "top-down TQC education program" with the specific goal of educating all of the 16,000 employees of the Kashima Corporation in three years, starting from the top management down to the new employees.

It is reported that today the Kashima Corporation has 1,500 active QC circles at all levels and across departmental divisions. The TQC education has required the president and other executives to frequently visit branch offices and construction sites. Their visits have resulted in far better communication between the top management and the lower levels of management. The TQC activities have also promoted problem-oriented attitudes toward daily work functions and high morale among all of the employees.[7]

The Success of Japanese QC Circles and Socio-Cultural Factors

In 1980, NBC's special documentary program on the comparisons of Japanese and American industrial productivity titled "If Japan Can, Why Can't We?" caused sensational reactions among the American industrial experts and labor management scholars. Obviously, questions were asked throughout the program as to whether or not the American industries can adopt the Japanese style of QC circles and regain their world leadership in industrial productivity which they once enjoyed until a few decades ago. The answer was "Yes," but this affirmative answer should be qualified. There are many unique Japanese soci-cultural factors that have contributed to the phenomenal success of Japan's QC circle activities.

Homogeneity of the Population in Japan

Japan is a remarkably homogeneous country in race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture. There are no racial, ethnic or religious differences between the managerial and worker classes. They speak the same language and share the same culture. This homogeneity of the

Japanese population is an extremely important sociological factor in determining success of the QC circle in Japanese industries, because it promotes egalitarianism, harmony and solidarity among all of the people. Japanese managers can easily accept the proposition that average workers are not so different from them and that they are capable of contributing to the organizational goals if they are given the proper training and the opportunity to prove themselves. In other words, every member of the organization is an innovator and a quality-control inspector regardless of his status.

Therefore, the Japanese managers and workers are willing to accept the important premise that the causes of poor-quality performance are not known by either management or the workers and that analysis is needed to discover and remedy the causes by the joint efforts of both parties. This amicable cooperation between management and the workers, which is based on fundamental egalitarianism and mutual trust, undoubtedly works as a strong motivational force.

The homogeneity of the work force in major Japanese business enterprises is further nurtured by their personnel recruitment policy. Annually they recruit management trainees from among the new graduates of only the prestigious universities and hire new graduates from good high schools as office clerks and production workers. Some enterprises make it a practice to hire all of their new workers only from the universities and high schools whose former graduates have already proven themselves to be excellent managers and workers within these organizations. Consequently, all of the new recruits are not only homogeneous in age but they are also similar in educational and personal qualifications. This practice also promotes the senpai-kohai kankei or "senior-junior relationships" between the experienced members and the new recruits who studied at the same schools. Furthermore, it guarantees that all these workers have generally high educational backgrounds and that they are able to fully understand the basic statistical methods of quality control and to acquire other required knowledge or skills without any difficulty.

In addition, all the new employees of any Japanese organization are put through "indoctrination sessions" which may include a few days of meditation exercise at a Zen temple or rigorous physical exercise at a retreat, daily recitation of the company creed, and the company song, and

participation in group discussion sessions, all of which are designed to promote harmony and cohesiveness among all the participants. The Japanese company usually holds a nyuushashiki, or "entering-company ceremony," in April in order to publicly welcome the new workers. This is an elaborate ceremony attended by the new employees, their parents, school officials (in charge of placement), the president, the top executives, and the department heads. In his keynote speech, the president officially welcomes the new employees, thanks the parents and teachers for having raised such a fine group of young people, and exhorts the incoming employees to work diligently as fresh members of the "company-family." Then, a representative of the new employees responds to the president's challenge and makes a pledge that every member will do his utmost. This is the beginning of the emotional and personal bond between the management and the new recruits throughout the latter's lifetime tenure with the company. This and other ceremonies will continue to remind them of their total commitment to the organizational goals.[8] In short, they are also expected to be homogeneous in thought and in action, as they are the same products of the particular corporate culture.

Lifetime Employment and Seniority-Based Compensation

The job security guaranteed by the lifetime employment system in Japanese enterprises is another critical factor in promoting active QC circle activities. Every manager, supervisor or worker can make as many labor- or cost-saving suggestions as he wants to, because he does not need to worry about being laid off or fired as the result of his suggestions for higher efficiency and productivity. It is reported that between April 1979 and March 1980, Toyota Motor Company received 13.29 quality or efficiency improvement suggestions per employee and Nissan Motor Company recieved 9.02 suggestions per employee, and 92.0% and 85.7% of them were adopted by the respective companies.[9] On the other hand, General Motors receives an average of less than one suggestions from each employee per year and adopts one-third of the ideas, even though the company actively recruits productivity suggestions from employees and offers up to $10,000 for a proposal that is adopted.[10] It is also an established fact that more industrial robots are being used on the automobile assembly lines at the Toyota and the Nissan plants than at any other American automobile plants. In Japan, the robots do not

take jobs away from the employees but they help improve productivity and efficiency.

While it may seem to the average American observer that the nenkoojoretsu, or "seniority-based promotion and compensation," is counter-productive in motivating Japanese workers, it also plays an indispensable role in maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and in providing the sense of security to those senior supervisors with marginal competence. Because they are assured that they will be promoted and paid on the basis of seniority, they are not threatened by the younger and more technically competent workers. Consequently, they are always willing to share with the younger workers whatever knowledge or skills that they may have and cooperate fully with each other for common goals as members of a cohesive team. And the younger workers look forward to the "delayed rewards" or the privileges given to the senior workers in later years, instead of seeking immediate rewards for their good work. The nekoojoretsu, then, is a sort of preventive measure or safeguard against disruptive interpersonal rivalries and individualistic competition within the work groups. In fact, no senior supervisor will be demoted simply because he no longer is the most competent person in his work group. He can safely expect that his younger and more competent subordinates will support him diligently so that he can continue to hold on to his supervisory position. The Japanese idea of hiring a "whole person" until his retirement, rather than his skills or expertise only when needed, is another reason why Japanese QC circles are so successful.

Japanese Enterprise Unions and QC Circles

The most important feature of Japanese labor unions is strong enterprise unionism. An enterprise union is organized autonomously by workers within a given enterprise. In the case of a multiplant enterprise, workers are usually organized in a unit at each plant and these units form a federation within the enterprise. Its membership includes all regular employees regardless of occupation or job status. The membership, therefore, consists of production workers, office clerks, engineers, and even lower-level managers. Leaders of the enterprise union are elected from among the regular employees in the enterprise. The elected union officials usually maintain their employment relationship with the company as they wish to retain the right to return to their jobs. They are also given

regular promotions in rank based on seniority while they are devoting themselves to union activities.[11] It is not uncommon that good work as union officials leads to promising careers within the management, because their effectiveness means that they work for the collective interests of both the union and the management rather than for the union's benefit alone.

The management's paternalism also pervades the union activities. The union's offices and other facilities are commonly provided by the company, free of charge. It is the company, not the union, which provides the union members with low-cost housing, low-mortgage financing, medical and dental care, recreational facilities, retirement and insurance plans, and training. Consequently, the Japanese union members are far more loyal to their company than their American counterparts are.

Except for several strong national unions, therefore, most industrial or trade unions in Japan are loosely organized unions with no real power to bargain with industrial employers, because there are very wide variations in working conditions, employment security, wages and welfare facilities.[12] In addition, competition, especially among the same lines of industry, is so intense that one enterprise union must fiercely "fight" along with the management to win the competition over other unions. For example, the enterprise unions of four Japanese auto-makers, those of Toyota, Nissan, Honda, and Mazuda, are constantly engaging in "fiercest battles" to out-perform each other rather than collaborating with each other to improve the unions' own interest. QC circles within the context of the Japanese enterprise union are not the "enemies of the union." Rather, they are not only an acceptable but also the most efficent means to achieve the organizational goals that will improve the members' own welfare. The union members fully recognize that the management is their indispensable partner in running the successful QC circle activities, because the management is also deeply involved and is always willing to adopt worthwhile suggestions from them for mutual benefits.

"Crisis Syndrome" and Productivity

Even though Japan has been able to continue its high industrial productivity and vigorous exporting to the envy of the other industrialized nations, the Japanese themselves are not psychologically comfortable with what they have accomplished thus far. They are always fearful of the

international economic crises brought about by sudden changes in international politics that could easily undermine Japan's current economic prosperity in a matter of several months. The majority of well-informed Japanese really agree that Japan is a "Fragile Blossom"[13] rather than an "Economic Superpower," although the latter is the image of Japan that has been popularized by several American writers. They know that Japan has to import almost all of its industrial raw materials, as well as a large amount of foodstuff, and that embargoes on a few of these items can cause both economic and social crises in Japan. In fact, the Japanese vividly remember such crises of recent years--the energy crisis of 1973, the Iranian crisis in 1979 and 1980, the soybean embargo by the United States in 1973, and a series of anti-Japanese economic sanctions and threats against the importation of Japanese textiles, steel, TV sets and automobiles by the United States and the European Common Market countries over the past two decades.

Consequently, the Japanese are "crisis prone" or overly sensitive as to their status in the world. This "crisis syndrome" is often exploited by the Japanese enterprises in their effort to have the workers dedicate themselves to higher and higher productivity while Japan is allowed to continue its ongoing economic activities. In other words, high productivity is a matter of national survival to which every responsible Japanese citizen must dedicate himself. Many company songs never fail to mention that every employee must work for the building of "independent Japan" or "stong Japan." The old slogan, Wakon Yosai or "Japanese Spirit and Western Technology," used during the Meiji Restoration of the 1860's, still seems to have the same effect upon the modern Japanese business leaders and workers who work diligently and selflessly for the future security of Japan.

SUMMARY

Two important factors of the successful QC circle activities in Japan are the voluntary participation and goal-oriented devotion of every QC circle member. Top Japanese management initiates and works with labor to promote and implement QC ideas at all levels of the corporate hierarchy, making labor-management a true partnership based on mutual trust and common goals.

The analysis presented in this paper also shows that the success of Japanese QC circles is derived from the homogeneity of Japanese population, the traditional Japanese personnel management policies such as recruitment and training of new graduates from selected schools, lifetime employment, seniority-based compensation system, and company-familism. In other words, the people, the societal structure, and the cultural values of Japan are not hinderances but are positive factors contributing to the successful adoptation of the quality control ideas of the Americans, Deming and Juran.

Therefore, it may not be unreasonable to conclude that these American quality control experts merely helped the Japanese realize the application of the age-old Japanese work ethics, diligence, and group solidarity to their own QC circle activities through the introduction of a more scientific and systematic means of quality control originally developed in the United States.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Mr. Mitsutada Mano, President, Nissan Motors of Hawaii, Mr. Hisayuki Sakamizu of Nissan Motor Co., Ltd., Japan, Mr. Takaki Okamoto, Vice President, Ohbayashi Hawaii Corporation, and Mr. Takashi Yamada of Ohbayashi-Gumi Ltd., of Japan, for providing him with the most current information and data on QC and TQC circle activities in Japan.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Toshio Onda. "Moves Under Way to Help Americans--Past Trend of Japanese Companies Learning from their U. S. Counterparts is Reversing," Japan Economic Journal (September 2, 1980), 11.

[2] "American Manufacturers Strive for Quality--Japanese Style," Business Week (March 12, 1979), 32F.

[3] Personal interview with Mr. Hisayuki Sakamizu, Manager, Product Information and Export Service Department, Nissan Motor Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan, on March 4, 1981.

[4] Personal correspondence from Mr. Takashi Yamada, Manager, TQC Promotion Department, Ohbayashi-Gumi Ltd., Tokyo, Japan.

[5] Sakamizu.

[6] Tetsuji Koshiyama, Hideo Ohzono, and Taiji Sayo. Kensetsugyo Ni Okeru TQC No Donyuu--Tenkai To Dokoo (Introduction of TQC for Construction Industry: The Trend and Development) (1980), p. 30.

[7] Koshiyama, p. 35.

[8] Thomas P. Rohlen. For Harmony and Strength: Japanese White-Collar Organization in Anthropological Perspective (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 34-42.

[9] Nissan Motor Research Survey Report, dated October 20, 1980.

[10] "How Japanese Does It: The World's Toughest Competitor Stirs a U. S. Trade Storm," Time (March 30, 1981), 58.

[11] Hisashi Kawada. "Workers and Their Organizations," in Workers and Employers in Japan: The Japanese Employment Relations System, Kazuo Okochi, Bernard Karsh and Solomon B. Levine, editors (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 235-237.

[12] Kawada, pp. 238-239.

[13] Zbigniew Brezezinski. The Fragile Blossom: Crisis and Change in Japan (NY: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 7-14.